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ABSTRACT

Current educational and fiscal trends have combined to create a complex management environment in which two-year colleges have had to forgo long-range planning and concentrate on the immediate problem of dealing with ongoing change. The dilemma caused by this change is evident in the intensive reexamination of what community colleges should be and in the increasing need to plan programs, allocate resources, and negotiate collective bargaining contracts without any indication of future funding levels. Because this ongoing change threatens academic excellence and the potential for professional advancement that faculty need to perform well, two-year colleges must initiate original responses to these problems, such as the creation of student-centered guidelines for change management and the utilization of participatory management techniques to involve the entire institution in adapting to changing situations. Colleges must also deal with special problems and concerns, including the influence of pressure groups on legislatures, the need to adopt new budgeting techniques in the face of reduced funding, the effect of increasing tuition on educational access, and the pros and cons of adopting marketing techniques for student recruitment. Other issues intertwined with these problems include the use of institutional research, and the impact of trustee involvement, accountability, and student attrition. (JP)

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ERIC JUNIOR COLLEGE RESOURCE REVIEW

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THE AGONY OF CHANGE

by

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Chancellor
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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
Arthur M. Cohen, *Principal Investigator and Director*

THE AGONY OF CHANGE

More frequent change is demanded of community and junior colleges now than at any other period in their history. Enrollment slumps, collective bargaining agreements, redefined taxpayer priorities, legislative scrutiny, declining academic performance, and the advent of student consumerism have combined to create an environment of unprecedented complexity for postsecondary education. For example, California's Proposition 13 has provoked "more anxiety among California community college educators than any event has since the beginning of World War II when enrollment declined precipitously" (Lombardi, 1979 p. 7). And that piece of taxpayer-induced legislation represents but one of the forces with which community colleges are dealing.

We are also facing a period of intensive reexamination of the entire concept of what community colleges are — and what they should be. Our institutions have been going through a subtle evolution, shifting away from our previous emphasis on academic transfer education and toward increased concentration on vocational offerings. In fact, in many cases the numbers and percentages of transfer students have been steadily declining while the proportion of occupational majors has increased. This is just another of the factors which we will be considering in the future years — especially in terms of how this trend will influence our budgeting, our staffing, our physical facilities, and our priorities. We will also be questioning whether or not we have been neglecting the academic portion of our curricula in favor of booming occupational programs. If so, we will be examining ways in which that neglect can be remedied before we find our institutions becoming solely occupational in nature. As part of this process, we will be focusing on studying the improvement of our articulation agreements with four-year institutions, considering that too often our transfer students feel frustrated in their attempts to carry on their studies beyond our campuses.

Part of the problem that California community colleges are facing is the ongoing dilemma of being forced to plan programs, allocate resources, and negotiate collective bargaining contracts without any clear indication of what our future funding levels will be. Proposition 13 placed the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) in that situation. We were forced to come up with three contingency budgets — good, bad, and worst — before our 1978-79 fiscal year opened. Even as we began the year, we were unsure as to what our revenue would ultimately be. It is a tribute to the flexibility of all of this state's two-year colleges that we were able to perform so well under this kind of uncertainty. But effective planning cannot be continually based upon dealing with the urgent; there must also be time to contemplate the implications of budgeting that go far beyond the dollar-and-cents matters.

The future holds little in the way of relief. We can now only see a chorus line of question marks lining up before us. We don't know whether or not the shortfall in taxes in one area will be made up by the imposition of increased taxes in another. We don't know where education will be placed when the statewide list of budgetary priorities is drawn up. Nor do we know how we will fare when our institutions are subjected to intense scrutiny by the legislators, as well as the special interest groups which will undoubtedly be trying to influence those lawmakers. The luxury of long-range planning is simply not available to us. It isn't a matter of choosing whether or not to maintain the status quo; the status quo is no longer an option. Our only avenue of choice is in determining how well or how poorly we will deal with ongoing change.

This, then, is the true agony of change — the nearly constant climate of uncertainty in which we find ourselves making decisions, reordering priorities, and evaluating programs.

One of the highest priorities during periods of fiscal cutbacks must be the maintenance of employee morale. We can only offer reduced options for financial rewards, as well as fewer opportunities for career growth, since most of our institutions have imposed freezes on hiring and upon the avenues to professional advancement within our hierarchies. In addition, we are often forced to play Solomon, weighing the merits and needs of one department against another in a juggling act that is bound to disappoint someone, no matter which decision we ultimately make.

At the Los Angeles Community College District we are working to develop people-oriented criteria for our decision-making, rather than becoming side-tracked by the processes and the politics of various alternatives. Everyone seems to be talking about productivity, the better, more efficient utilization of resources. But we are concerned with stressing the better utilization of our *human* resources — increasing our personal and our institutional productivity in this way. The danger lies in failing to create the environment in which excellence can flourish, both for our students and for our personnel. That failure could eventually paralyze us, both as individuals and as educators.

NEW PROBLEMS, NEW SOLUTIONS

The Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges has identified six major political influences alone which it predicts will continue to affect our institutions through finance reform (Craig, 1978). These forces include the inherent friction of dual governance systems, constituent diversity vis-a-vis the state legislature, and the tendency to come up with piecemeal solutions to existing fiscal problems.

Methods of coping with the current wide-ranging and unrelenting wave of change range from the "active/reactive" mode of response to management-by-objectives. But one thing remains clear — the proper stance for two-year institutions will be to take the initiative in dealing with change, to create rather than passively respond to the outside forces which will continue to affect our institutions. The challenge will lie in cultivating effective and innovative decision-making in a less-than-stable atmosphere.

A number of theories on dealing with change have developed to meet this need.

"Student-centered" guidelines for change emphasize maintaining quality educational programs even as the social and economic roles of the community college are reexplored (Marsee, 1978). Those who see the future as requiring a "transformed" community college predict that our adaptation will require a reconciliation of dichotomized academic and vocational functions, as well as more emphasis on determining and measuring competencies in a variety of career areas (Scheele, 1977). This will be particularly relevant in light of declining academic standards nationwide. And a survey to determine advantages and disadvantages of the management-by-objective approach to planning, outlined in a paper by Carter (1979), indicated that effects included a greater feeling of involvement in decision-making, an increase in contacts between supervisor and subordinate, and a higher rate of suggestions offered and accepted by various personnel. This higher degree of involvement can be crucial to successful adaptation to change, we've found at LACCD.

Some see careful definition of the college mission, clear articulation agreements, and well-developed educational support systems as among the vital criteria to dealing constructively with change (Reid, [1977]). It seems that goals and objectives must be more clearly defined in periods of institutional stress. Or, as Freud once said, ambiguous goals lead to ambiguous outcomes. And others see change itself as beneficial to the future success of our institutions, especially if that process involves increasing learning productively through doing away with what one author calls the three fundamental practices of education — classes, semesters, and grades — which Cross (1978) says are directly counterproductive to the real purposes of learning.

STATE/LOCAL CONTROL

Reduced resources also mean increased legislative scrutiny as lawmakers gain more control over budget allocations. This trend shows no signs of abating, and part of the problem will continue to manifest itself in terms of conflicting and overlapping areas of authority (Zoglin, 1977). A task force empowered by the Michigan legislature to ponder the roles and interrelationships between community colleges and the state and local governing boards determined that the purposes of education are best served when the state remains sensitive to the need for institutional autonomy by encouraging a democratic system of governance (Michigan State Board for Public Community and Junior Colleges, 1977). The question remains, however, about how much influence should be exerted by those interest groups. After Proposition 13 California community colleges found that increased legislative scrutiny generally is reflective of increased pressure on those lawmakers by various special interest groups. For example, children's centers were among the programs strongly lobbied for. They were also among the items "protected", funding-wise, by the legislature.

REDUCED FINANCES

Relevant to the discussions of state-local control as well as those dealing with reduced finances are Augenblick's (1978) findings on significant problems inherent to a state-supported finance system. But new funding mechanisms mean that decision-making will involve a larger variety of groups, each of which has a greater voice in expenditures and priority-setting (Martorana and Others, 1978).

Another approach to reduced finances is zero-based budgeting, which its advocates say offers a functional alternative based upon justifying programs, setting objectives, measuring results, and then evaluating programs (Adamson, 1978). Also incorporating a tough look at resources and priorities is a resource allocation system utilized by Gadsden State Junior College, which incorporates a faculty-based Priorities Advisory Committee, a program-costing procedure based upon enrollment figures, and a budgeting plan integrated with the college's planning system (Bers, 1978).

Small and rural community colleges have their own distinct problems when it comes to funding cutbacks and state control, as discovered by Bottenfield (1978), including the fact that certain expenditures — such as library, grounds maintenance, accrediting specifications, salaries and fringe benefits, and costs of complying with government regulations — must be paid by community colleges regardless of the size of the institution.

TUITION

Passage of Proposition 13 by California voters did much more than affect direct budget deliberations and influence the balance of state and local governance. Indirectly, it has also focused increased attention on the possibility of implementing tuition in the state's 107 community colleges, which have remained the last stronghold of tuition-free education in this country. While tuition might allow colleges to retain more freedom and local control, there is great concern that imposition of a fee structure would threaten the traditional open door offered to the financially and educationally disadvantaged (Erickson and McCuen, 1978). The Colorado legislature has also been examining the question of tuition, and the state's Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education ([1977]) has studied expense base, sector pricing, and unit pricing in response to this increased lawmaker interest. The Board's findings tie lower tuition costs to maintenance of access, and the Board itself comes out in favor of the concept of sector pricing, which imposes a uniform resident tuition regardless of the size or location of the individual college.

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

The problems outlined so far in this overview by no means exist in a vacuum. They are closely intertwined with other considerations, and their solution will require new tools for problem-solving.

According to Stevenson and Walleri (1978), institutional research is more important than ever in dealing with reduced resources. Depending upon the college's size, they outline three forms of research which can be used for program evaluation: the first is a market-oriented mode relying upon enrollment trends; the second utilizes input from instructors and administrators in order to project institutional plans; and the third follows a state-oriented approach to program development.

Also becoming more prominent in the world of education are discussions of marketing, which its advocates say can help forestall the ill effects of a dwindling pool of 18- to 24-year-olds. Marketing carries with it some highly emotional connotations and there are some educators who feel this approach is inconsistent with the goals of education. This view will undoubtedly be subject to revision in light of the hard realities of the 1980s, however. And studies of the impact of marketing campaigns do much to counter the arguments of its detractors. At Prince George's Community College in Maryland, for example, a 15 percent increase in student headcount and a 12 percent jump in credit hours resulted from the first year of a marketing program (El Sharei, 1979). According to an analysis of the campaign, involvement of everyone from the college president, faculty and staff to students and alumni helped make the project a success.

Trustee involvement in policy-making and program development was studied by Gill (1978), who wrote that effective board members must be aware of community needs and trends, educational philosophies, and hard data on such matters as dropout rates and program completions. Gill noted that, while trustees are somewhat removed from the actual implementation of educational innovations, they still must be familiar with both the philosophical and the nuts-and-bolts aspects of their colleges in specific and higher education in general.

Four speakers at the Annual Governor's Workshop for Community College Trustees in Tallahassee, Florida touched on

means by which to increase trustee effectiveness (Florida State Department of Education, 1977). These addresses covered such topics as the relationship between presidents and trustees, accountability, policy-making and policy-implementation, and local versus state control.

Accountability to consumer-oriented students and taxpayers is another educational issue that will be increasingly evident in the 1980s. Community colleges will have to become more responsive to the needs of the growing numbers of nontraditional students, including the estimated 11 million students over the age of 35 who are expected to be enrolled in two-year institutions in 1980 (Zarakov, 1978).

In addition, accountability and student consumerism are indirectly related to the troublesome problem of student attrition, which is affecting all of higher education. A survey of nearly 300 students at Mercer County Community College (Gorter, 1978) was conducted to try to pinpoint the various causes for non-returning students. That study found that the most frequent reason cited by full-time students who decided not to continue their studies at Mercer was the feeling that they were doing poorly academically. Part-time students most often cited goal attainment or transfer as their reasons for not returning to the college. The survey also found that part-timers who decided against continuing at the college had more credits and higher grade point averages than did the general population of part-timers. Pezzullo (1978) also addressed this issue in a brief which points out that many students who are designated as non-returners are, in actuality, completers in terms of their own educational goals.

Women who are returning to college after an absence from the educational world face problems that are unique to them which create their own "agony of change." But it has been found that a well-developed system of support services can favorably affect the attrition rates among these students (Reimal, 1976). According to this study undertaken at the University of Northern Colorado, the most beneficial of those services have been found to be peer counseling, tutoring, and identity centers.

These are a few of the considerations we face in the 1980s. Change is constant. The only difference now is that more of the forces affecting our colleges are undergoing more rapid change than ever before. However, we will respond to all of them; we have no other choice.

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